

Room With a View by GallifreyGod

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Summary:

When Joyce Byers, a young adult who suffers from Cystic Fibrosis, is put in the hospital, she meets a man like no other. A cancer patient named Jim Hopper begins to show her the ups and downs of hospital life. As they ride through the craziness of illness, they start to realize it may be more than friendship, right when they watch it all comes crashing down.

1. Welcome to Room 240

Author's Note:

So, this is set in modern day 2017. Joyce and Hopper are both 27 years old as well. You're probably gonna notice that I'm lacking on a lot of the medical input but what I do know is from hundreds of hours of Greys Anatomy and House. I know a lot goes into a Cystic Fibrosis patient but I don't want to be ignorant and add or subtract things that I don't know so you'll see that a lot of that stuff isn't necessarily brought to the light.

Loosely based on Red Band Society

Also wanted to say that the original character Jenny always looked like Joanna Gaines in my head so if you don't know how to picture her, that's how I picture her.

Joyce took as deep of a breath as she could to try to calm her nerves. The nasal cannula that hugged her cheeks was becoming a safety blanket for her, providing the oxygen she forgot to breath when she was nervous.

She could feel her nerves frayed throughout her body as they wheeled her off the elevator. She was used to being admitted for tune-ups of course, but not long-term stays!

Her doctor, Sam Owens, decided since her illness was rapidly bringing her down that it was best she stay in the hospital while UNOS bumped her up on the transplant list. She couldn't say she was very excited about the whole deal of course, but new lungs came with an obvious price.

As her new nurse wheeled her into the 26th floor of Hawkins Hospital, she could see the long-term patients eyeing her down. That was common with tune-ups, but now that she was staying for who knows how long? It was kind of intimidating.

"This would be your room." the nurse said politely as she stopped the wheelchair. Helping Joyce out of the chair, she knocked warningly on the door before opening it.

"Jimmy, hope you're decent. Your new roommate is here." the nurse called into the room before bringing Joyce in. The entire back half of the room looked like a bachelor pad and what was presumably her side of the room was bare and empty.

"Look at you Jenny, always bringing me gifts," Hopper said as he strummed his guitar one last time before setting it back in its case.

"Down boy. This is Joyce. She's here for long term just like you." Jenny said with an eyebrow raise. To Joyce, it looked like they were having a mental conversation, which only terrified her even more.

"I'm Jim, Jim Hopper. What's your poison?" he asked with a smile as he got up to greet her. He was bald but he didn't look frail and sickly like she expected him to.

"Cystic Fibrosis. You?" Joyce asked as she shook his hand.

"Eh, it's not important," Jim said as he brushed it off. Without notice, Jenny the nurse slipped out and left them be.

"Welcome to Room 240. The coolest cell in this entire prison. Can I get you something to drink? I got Sprite, Pepsi, Coke. I also have some tequila if you're more hardcore." Hop laughed as he rifled through his mini fridge.

"Uh, I'm good." Suddenly, Joyce felt like she was in a frat house more than a hospital. It wasn't the best feeling but at least he was nice.

"Cystic Fibrosis huh? You're obviously not in for a tune if you're here for long term. What's the deal?" he asked as he sat back down in his bed.

"Pseudomonas nicked my lungs harder than usual last time. They felt it was safer if I was here until transplant. I'm more surprised they didn't throw me in isolation like last time." Joyce groaned as she rolled her eyes.

"Ah well, there's enough medical bullshit in this hospital alone so tell me about you, not your illness," Hop asked as he sat on the parallel bed with his legs crossed.

"Not much really, divorcee, no kids, I was a journalist for a while but... you know." Joyce tried to brush it off as best as she could as she got up to unpack.

"Similar for me but I was a cop in training instead of a journalist. Anyways, the door to the bathroom is to your left, help yourself to anything in the fridge, and I hope you don't mind the very loud moaning porn I play on my white noise machine to help me sleep." Jim wished he could take a photo of the reaction that Joyce gave him.

"I'm kidding, I'm kidding!" he tried to plead with a laugh but Joyce rolled her eyes. "You gotta laugh to survive in here, we're all just used to it by now. Rule one of long-term, laugh at literally everything. If it makes you want to cry, then laugh instead. It'll keep you alive."

"Duly noted. What about you? What's your story?" Joyce asked as she laid her favorite blanket over the hospital bed.

"I have a malignant cardiac sarcoma. Little tumor hanging out in my left ventricle. Waiting on UNOS to stop dragging their asses and get me a heart." Hop groaned as flopped backward on his bed.

"I'm so sorry -" Joyce began but Hopper brushed his hand in the air. "None of that, I appreciate it but, no. No pity."

"Understood. How long have you been in here?" she asked as she packed her pillow into a nicer case.

"Eh, four or five months maybe. They gave me six months on diagnosis but it's been almost a year for me. They can't get rid of me that easy." Joyce chuckled at the last part while she set a picture frame onto her bedside table. The one perk of long-term was being able to decorate as much as you wanted - clearly in Jim's case since the room looked like a dorm.

"So, what do you do around here to keep yourself from going insane?" she asked as while folding her clothes and putting them inside her dresser.

"Well, it depends. We have an Xbox, sometimes we all get together and play cards, lots of board games, we play pranks on each other, we hang out on the roof, sometimes we'll help out within pediatrics for story time and all that. It's really about what you can find to do." Jim stated as he chucked a nerf football up and down, catching it each time.

"Doesn't sound *too* boring I guess." Joyce chuckled.

"Yeah, it's not all dreary and dark like *Grey's Anatomy*, at least not all the time." Jim laughed. In all honesty, it was music to Joyce's ears.

Laughter wasn't one of the main noises you heard in a hospital or let alone from a patient. It was a deep rumble of a laugh, it was quite beautiful actually. It was a laugh she definitely wouldn't mind hearing for a long time.

Maybe this wouldn't be too bad.

2. World Against Me

Summary for the Chapter:

Joyce and Hopper talk a little bit about their past

"Checkmate!" Hopper cried happily as he snatched the white queen chess piece off the board. Joyce stuck her middle finger up with a giggle as she cracked open another can of Pepsi.

"Knock knock." the two looked up to see Doctor Owens as he walked in, chart clutched under his armpit.

"How's it hanging, Warden?" Hopper asked as she leaned back in his chair. Joyce pulled her knees to her chest after waving to the doctor.

"Joyce, how are you settling in?" he asked with his normal charismatic attitude.

"I'm doing alright. At least it's not isolation." She laughed as Sam pulled a chair over.

"Well, I came to let you know that a UNOS rep is coming down for a meeting with the board. They want to look further into your charts and see if they can bump you up further." Sam said with a small smile.

It was hard for Joyce to get excited about that anymore. The first time she heard the UNOS board was coming to look over her case, she nearly peed herself with joy. Now, since it's happened about 15 more times since then, it just didn't feel the same.

"Well, tell them I'm waiting patiently. Whatever happens, happens." Joyce replied with a small raise of her brows.

"I certainly will. You're scheduled for chest P.T. today at noon and again at five. Your CF team might drop by and discuss their plans in the meantime. If you need anything just let me know." with a handshake and a wave, he was off.

"You don't seem too thrilled about the UNOS meeting. Something on

your mind?" Jim asked quietly, punctuating with a sip of his soda.

Joyce fidgeted with the clasp on her oxygen cannula, avoiding eye contact at all costs.

"It's just... that used to sound like good news. Now it just feels like every time they talk it doesn't move any further. I should've had my lungs a while ago." she mumbled the last part angrily before sighing.

"A long time ago— both my sister, Karen and I were on a transplant list for lungs" Joyce started. "She has Cystic Fibrosis too. When a motorcycle accident sent a donor in, they had to decide who to give the lungs to. She was more likely to survive the surgery than I was, plus the fact that she had a family which they seem to make a difference with. Obviously, they wanted her around so she could raise her family."

Jim sat and listened quietly as she continued.

"I was *too* sick at that point. They didn't know if my body would even be able to handle the transplant. So, Karen got the lungs and I'm still waiting. I know how terrible it sounds to be jealous but it's hard not to be." she felt the tears stinging in her eyes as she spoke.

"It's normal to be jealous. It's a touchy subject which makes you feel guilty but jealousy is rational. I'm sure you love your sister and want her to be healthy but the jealousy comes in when it's *you* who's left to suffer. Trust me, I understand." Hopper said as he patted her arm. Consoling people wasn't something that he was very strong at but living in a hospital, you learn how to make due with it.

"I think the most annoying part of it is that she doesn't take care of her lungs either. She lost control after her transplant, saying that she was just trying to get back the years she lost. She doesn't take her medication and she smokes too. She's an idiot though." Rolling her eyes as she spoke, Joyce felt her blood boil at the thought of the whole situation. It just wasn't fair.

Jim leaned across the table, his expression serious for the first time as he patted her hand. "You're going to get your new lungs. I promise you will get the transplant at some point."

"Don't make promises you can't keep." Joyce whimpered with a pout.

"I absolutely promise. Hell, I can almost promise you that my transplant story is a lot wilder than yours." Jim said as he cracked a smile. She looked up at him, ready to listen.

"My UNOS pager rang, I came down to the hospital because they called and said they had a heart ready. I get prepped for surgery and they come out and tell me the hearts a flop. What do you fucking know? They find a quarter-sized tumor in the guy's ticker. It's like the universe just stuck a big middle finger up at me and said *'haha Jimmy, no heart for you!'*"

Joyce felt bad that she almost choked a laugh until she saw Jim laughing too.

"It's okay to laugh. Remember, it keeps you alive." Hopper encouraged with a chuckle along with her.

"That is fucking terrible!" Joyce said with full blown laughter. Quickly her laughter was halted by a horrific cough emitting from her chest.

"I'm okay, I'm okay." she dismissed once she got her breath back. She could see Jim was nervously on the edge of his seat.

"It happens. I'll be alright." Trying to take deep breaths, Joyce regained herself.

"Hey assholes, watch where you're going!" Hopper shouted as Phil Callahan and Calvin Powell nearly knocked Joyce over. The two of them were on their way to the cafeteria when Hopper's idiot friends busted between them.

"Its tater tot day, Hop! First come first serve." Callahan shouted as he kept running.

"Jesus, what are they? Sixth graders?" Joyce giggled.

"Apparently they are. Are you alright? They didn't hit you too hard, did they?" Hop asked in a worried tone.

"I'm fine, anyway. What's so special about the tater tots here?" she questioned as they stepped into the elevator.

"Its the only thing on the menu that doesn't taste like dirt. The guys get extra pissed off when I order takeout pizza and don't share." both of them laughed as the elevator alerted them with a ding.

"So why are they in long term?" Joyce asked quietly. As they walked into the cafeteria, she could see the two almost reaching over the counter for their tater tots.

"Phil has a tumor in his shin, he's admitted for a clinical trial. Calvin has two bum kidneys. That or they're both just dumb as shit and labeled incompetent to live on their own." Jim laughed along with her as they grabbed trays.

"They are really going to town on those tater tots," Joyce noted with disgust at the two grown men eating like four-year-olds.

"At least none of them are choking this time." he rolled his eyes as he picked a tater tot up with his fork.

"*This time?*" she asked with her eyes as wide as golf balls.

"Oh yeah. Shoveling tater tots in their mouths and Phil starts choking like all holy hell. Rely on big Jim to go over there and givem' the ole Heimlich." Hopper smiled as he saw Joyce laugh at him for mimicking the maneuver.

"There really isn't a boring moment here, is there?" she laughed as she picked at her food.

"Not really. Especially when those idiots get their hands on the medical marijuana they have here. I swear to God it's like watching *Jackass* in real life." Joyce almost choked on her spoon with a laugh.

"I'd say that I'd pay a lot of money to see that but I have a feeling I'm gonna see that whether I like it or not." Hopper returned a similar laugh at Joyce's statement.

"You could lock them in a sauna when they're stoned, flash a flashlight in their faces and tell them they're on the sun and they'd believe you. Trust me, I've done it before." Hopper and Joyce both doubled over laughing, earning confused looks from everybody in the cafeteria.

3. Keep Faith

Summary for the Chapter:

Joyce and Jim, two partners in crime.

The first few weeks of Joyce being admitted into Hawkins Hospital had been quite a bit different than she expected. Of course, there were always hiccups, but several memories she would never forget started in just less than a month.

"Hopper!" Joyce shrieked as she walked into their shared room. Sitting on both of their beds were dozens of boxed pizzas.

"Why are there seventy pizzas in our room?" She asked with a flame in her eye.

Jim smiled with two sliced of pizza in his hand. "Ah, I was down in the lobby when the pizza guys came." Jim clearly had a mouth full of pizza. "I guess the kid's ward ordered a bunch for their Halloween party but I was like '*oh yeah, they're collecting them in room 240.*' And I was hungry. In case you haven't noticed, hospital food tastes like monkey ass." He finished with a gulp.

Joyce didn't know whether to chastise him or fall to the ground with laughter. After deep consideration, she remembered Hop's number one rule.

With an amused laugh, she sat down on the bed next to him and dove into the first pizza box.

"Are we bad people for this?" Joyce asked with her mouth full of pizza.

Jim shrugged innocently. "Depends on how you define 'bad' because I think we're just hungry. Jenny will come and get the rest of the pizza before we can finish anyways."

"That's true. What's the harm?" Just as Joyce finished her sentence, her chest P.T. therapist, Claudia, walked in the door.

"Joyce, are you ready for... what is going on in here?" Claudia asked as she glared at the two.

Jim and Joyce exchanged nervous glances back and forth. Before the two could say anything, the therapist was clearly paging her co-workers to report the location of the stolen pizza.

As the P.T. therapist stepped out of the room, Jim and Joyce quietly started hiding boxes of pizza to keep. Several of the boxes were shoved under their beds and into their mini fridge to keep for themselves.

The two patients always found themselves in some kind of trouble together. Stealing pizza wasn't the first of it either. They both may have been 27 years old, but it didn't stop them from acting like teenagers.

Jenny swung open the door to room 240. She could tell by the smoke that was seeping out from under the door that the two of them were up to something.

The scent of medical marijuana was so pungent that it almost knocked her over.

"You have to be kidding me! Joyce, tell me you aren't smoking that!" Jenny cried. Hopper was reclined back in a chair with a joint pressed between his lips while Joyce laid in her bed.

"No, but..." Joyce suddenly burst out laughing. "Did you know that the pharm...pharmacy has edibles for people like me? You know..." she started laughing and pointing to her nasal cannula. She had a bag of medicinal gummy bears that Hopper clearly gave her. Leftovers from his chemo days apparently.

"Don't tell Jenny though, she'll have my ass!" Joyce whispered with a laugh as she gently elbowed Jenny in the ribs.

"She talks a lot when she's high," Jim stated as he strummed his guitar. They were clearly two different types of high. Joyce was laughing and spacey while Jim was mellow but aware.

Jenny groaned and pinched the bridge of her nose. "Why would you even give her this stuff, Jim?" she asked with a glare.

"It wasn't like she was smoking it, Jennifer. Relax a little bit. Do you want some? I won it from Phil in a poker game." Hopper held the joint out as an offer to her.

"The audacity you two have it just mindblowing." Jenny scuffed angrily as she confiscated the rest of their stash.

"Buzzkill." Both Joyce and Jim murmured as Jenny shut their door.

"Have you ever cut hair before?" Hopper asked as he walked in with an electric shaver. Of course, the smile on his face made it seem like a big joke.

"Excuse me?" Joyce laughed, setting her book down on her bedspread.

"I've got stubble growing back and I need it gone." Hopper rubbed his hand over the shadow of hair growing back. "Its a pain in the ass to shave it myself."

"Why aren't you let it grow back out?" Joyce asked with a concerned expression as she tiptoed off her bed. Despite the height difference, she was just able to run her hand over the growing stubble.

"A few weeks before you were admitted, Owens was talking with my team about doing another round of chemo as an attempt to slow the tumor. Since they don't know when the next heart is gonna trot in through their doors, they figured it's the best option. I think it's horse shit." he replied as he rolled his eyes.

"Here, sit down first," Joyce said as she patted her hand on the bed. Sitting down next to her, he looked at her curiously.

"Hop, why are you bald?" she asked simply.

"Because I have cancer. It's from the chemotherapy. Didn't we just go over this?" Jim asked with a confused laugh.

"That's not what I asked. Why are you bald?" she asked again. Her brows were raised as if he was supposed to understand what she was on to.

"Because I have canc-" he began before being interrupted again.

"No! Why are you bald?" Joyce asked a third time with a laugh.

"Fine. Because maybe- "

Joyce shook her head. "Nope!"

"Alright." Hop sighed. "Because I have faith this will work and help cure me."

"Bingo!" Joyce smiled. "Because you had and will continue to have faith that this will help. I know it seems like bullshit but keeping faith is one of my rules. Yours is always laughing, mine is keeping faith. So, we're gonna keep faith that this will at least help."

Hopper couldn't help but smile at her nauseating optimism. "Yeah, I guess I don't mind it bald either." he laughed as she ran her hand over his head again.

"It is kinda cute. Though I've never seen you *with* hair so I wouldn't know." Joyce chuckled, making Hopper smile even more.

"So, are you down to shave it?" he asked with his eyes wide, holding up the clippers.

"Only if I can do some cool designs before it's completely gone." Oh yes, his hair would be full of stars and spell out '*Joyce Rox*' before it was shaved.

"Deal." Hopper agreed, high-fiving her before they ran off to the bathroom.

The sound of the clippers buzzed over the music playing on Joyce's phone. Hopper wasn't the biggest fan of Radiohead but Joyce seemed to like it so he let it go. Hopper could feel the designs she was shaving on the back of his head.

"Did you just write your name on my head?" Hopper asked as they both burst out laughing.

"Every artist watermarks their work. I have to take credit somehow." she chuckled as she continued.

"Yeah well this is killing my back, hurry up and finish the Mona Lisa, Dicaprio," Hopper replied as he looked at her in the mirror.

"It's Da Vinci, not DiCaprio!" Joyce laughed so hard she doubled over and began wheezing.

"You okay?" Hop asked nervously as she gained her composure.

"Yeah, I'm good." she smiled as she made the first official strip with the buzzer.

4. You're a Saint

Summary for the Chapter:

Maybe having a roommate isn't so bad.

Joyce couldn't lie, she had been stuck with worse roommates before. Hop on the other hand? He was more like a blessing rather than a curse. Of course, upon finding out she would have a roommate during her stay, she was pretty nervous. She was actually surprised at how helpful Hopper had been in her first few weeks... and it helped that he made her laugh sometimes.

"I bet that when you talk with that on, it sounds like when you'd talk into a fan as a kid." Hopper laughed while he fussed with his Xbox controller.

Joyce smiled and rolled her eyes as her airway clearance vest buzzed against her. She had to admit, it was a little awkward that the nebulizer in her mouth was making her drool right in front of him, but he didn't seem to mind.

It had been a rough night. Instead of Hopper complaining about the horrific coughing fits she had, he stayed awake to sit with her. He could tell that she was a little rattled since she hadn't had a coughing spell that bad in a while, and not since she had been admitted.

Hop had even gotten out of bed, helping Joyce flip over on her side before repeating the back patting techniques that he watched her chest P.T. therapist do to her. While she fell asleep after the coughing fit, he stayed by her side for an extra half an hour and rubbed her back.

When Joyce woke up, she had barely remembered what had happened. She was expecting Hopper to yell at her for coughing all night, but she was rather surprised when the memory started to wake up with her. She felt sheepish when she thanked him, but he simply nodded and their day carried on.

"C'mon you stupid thing!" Hopper groaned as he continued to fuss

with the Xbox controller.

"What's wrong?" Joyce asked hoarsely after removing the nebulizer so she could talk. She didn't expect her throat to sound so bad, but at least she felt better.

"I'm playing Saints Row. I have to escape this ship but every time I get close to the ending, I crash. Fuck!" Hopper shouted again as he failed the quest to the game.

"Here, let me try." Joyce motioned for him to come sit on her bed while she situated the nebulizer back into her mouth. Hopper shifted comfortably into her bed next to her while she rapidly started pressing the buttons.

"Alright, see that crevice? Flip the ship about 90° and try to fly through it." he pointed to the screen but she ignored him, playing it her own way. Right as she reached the part he continued to fail, Hopper moved in closer to her.

"How the hell did you do that!" he shouted with joy as she managed to maneuver through the game perfectly. She shrugged as she handed the controller back to him. It was pretty obvious that behind the nebulizer, Joyce was giggling furiously.

"Damn JoJo, who knew you had the gaming skills." he huffed with shock before a smile grew on his face.

"My nephew taught me how to play a few games. Whenever I would babysit him, we'd always play." Joyce replied after taking the nebulizer out of her mouth again.

"I bet I'd kick your ass at Call of Duty though." Hop laughed as he got up to switch disks.

"How about I go down and get us some snacks while you finish up your airway clearance?" he suggested as Joyce nodded.

As Hop made his way down through the elevator and to the cafeteria, Powell and Callahan ran up to him excitedly. "Hop, Jenny is giving us the clear to head out for a little bit. You down for a beer run?" Powell asked, out of breath from running.

"No. I'm gonna stay back with Joyce," Hopper admitted without taking his eyes off of the vending machine.

"What?" the two asked in disbelief. "Hopper! You never miss beer runs! Now you're staying back with some chick you've known for a month?" Callahan asked with his eyes wide and horrified.

"She's not just some chick, you douche. Anyways, she doesn't feel good so I'm just gonna stay with her." he rolled his eyes at the immaturity of his next-door neighbors. They were worse than 16-year-olds.

"He's probably just trying to get laid." Powell groaned as he turned to Callahan.

Jim swung on his heel and grabbed Calvin by the collar. "Say that again to my face." he grit out with his teeth clenched and his nose crinkled. Powell and Callahan both looked like they were going to pee their pants.

"I am **not** trying to get her in bed. She's sick, have a little compassion." he spat out in his friend's face before grabbing his snacks and leaving the two idiots.

As Hop walked back into his room, the smile on Joyce's face washed his anger away. "Alright, I got Cheese-Its, Cheetohs, Kit-Kats, Oreos, and some Gatorade." he dropped the pile of vending machine food down on Joyce's table before grabbing their controllers.

"Hop, what happened?" Joyce asked with a sympathetic smile. It was obvious to anybody that he was pissed off when he walked in.

"Nothing, I'm fine," he answered, avoiding eye-contact.

"You were clearly angry when you walked in. Did someone say something?" she asked as he sat down next to her in bed.

"Just dumb and dumber across the hall, they were acting like idiots in the cafeteria. It's fine." he sighed while he pulled the game up on the screen. Hopper was trying his best to solve his temper, he didn't need Joyce getting upset over it.

As the day rolled into night, Hopper felt exhaustion slowly consuming him. He always went to the roof of the hospital when the days seemed long. Something about the fresh air and ability to see the sky without having to look through a window. He knew at some point he would bring Joyce up there, maybe when she was feeling better.

There was a ratty old couch on the top of the roof along with a few chairs and lights. Hop remembered the night that he and the guys snuck out to go curb surfing for something to put up there. In the dead of night, when the lobby was abandoned, the three of them dragged the couch through the elevators and up the stairs to the roof.

Christmas lights were strung from the old IV poles that Jenny said were outdated. It became a nice escape for them when hospital life got to be too much. Sometimes Jim went up there to escape his thoughts, other times it was so he could be with them alone. Tonight? He didn't exactly know why he was up on the roof.

"Hopper." the voice startled him as he looked over to see Calvin walking towards him. He shifted in his seat, clutching his beer and looking back over the skyline.

"What?" Hop asked quietly. There was no anger strung into his tone, just exhaustion. He just wanted to be alone.

Calvin sat down in a chair next to him and grabbed a beer. After a few sips, he turned to his friend and sighed. "I'm sorry about earlier. I didn't mean to say that," he admitted.

"Nah, it's fine. If you do it again, I'll kick your ass though." Jim chuckled along with him. The truth was, with any other woman he'd probably be doing exactly what Calvin had suggested. Not Joyce, though. She was better than that.

"Can I just ask, why not? I mean, she's beautiful and you seem to be getting along with her. What is it about her that makes you step back?" Calvin asked curiously. Jim was fairly surprised, he wasn't

such a dipshit when Callahan wasn't around.

"Because...that's Joyce. People walk in and out of here every single day, giving you the opportunity to hook up and never have to see them again. Joyce is different than that. She isn't some hit and ditch scheme, she means more than that. I like being friends with her, spending time and having fun. She takes my mind off of all... *this*."

Hopper replied with vague hand motions. He didn't want to get her in bed, he wanted to talk with her, play video games, and get to know her.

"She seems... *special* to you." Calvin raised his eyebrows as he looked back over the city.

"What are you suggesting?" Hop asked with a tired sigh. He was way too tired for this.

"You must really like her, Hop." Powell put it simply. Was he this dense?

"Of course I like her. She's awesome, she's funny, she's nice. She's my friend." he replied with a quizzical look towards Calvin.

"That's not what I mean, but whatever," Powell added as he looked away from Jim with a small smirk.

"What are you trying to say?" Jim asked, his temper wearing thin. He took another sip of his beer while Powell reclined back in his chair.

"Hopper, did you know I have a Ph.D. in Psychology?" he asked with a grin.

"No shit, really?" Hopper questioned with a shocked expression.

"Yeah, just because *Corky* follows me around everywhere doesn't mean I'm as dumb as him. I act like that around him because where else am I gonna get the chance to act young and dumb again? There are literally no rules here. This is my only time to be stupid again." Calvin searched for confirmation in Hop's face.

"Alright, what's your point, Einstein?" he asked tiredly while he polished off his drink.

"My point is, it doesn't have to take a psychologist to tell that you have feelings for Joyce," Calvin answered, standing up before getting a shitload of denial from his friend.

"No, I don't," Hopper grumbled under his breath once he was alone.

5. Set Your Pace

Summary for the Chapter:

Hopper's health starts to take a turn

Jenny smiled as she pushed a large cart into room 240. "Hopper! You ready for your EKG?" she asked, hoping he could hear through his headphones. As he removed the headset from his ears, music blared loudly into the silent room.

"Jesus, Jim. You're gonna go deaf with the music that loud." Jen groaned as she watched him sit up in his bed. It seemed like every morning she managed to nag him in some way when she came to do his daily EKG.

"I didn't want to wake Joyce up so I put my headphones on but she stepped out to grab some breakfast and I forgot I was wearing them." came the bullshit lie, just like every other time.

"Alright, whatever you say." she laughed as she stuck electrode tabs to his chest. "What are you doing today, any plans?" Jen asked as she waited for the monitor to start up.

"Probably get a bunch of hookers and coke." he joked, earning her a deadly glare. "I'm kidding. Probably go down and bully Ethel the lunch lady until she gives me free snacks. My fridge is running low." Jim spoke as he waited for the machine to finish.

As Jenny took the printed scan into her hands, her demeanor dropped into one of concern. Her brows furrowed while she wore one of those signature 'confused and worried' doctor looks.

"Al-Alright Jim. Hang tight, I gotta go grab Doc Owens for a minute. Don't move." she quickly swept out of the room, trailing down the halls to find Sam.

When he was nowhere in sight, Jenny pulled her pager off of her hip and began typing.

"He has no idea. No pain, no signs, nothing." Jenny said as she walked beside Doctor Owens, both on their way back to Hopper's room.

"Alright, the scan says its only mild for now but I'll take a listen to his chest and we can figure out the best route," Owens replied as he picked up the pace of his walk.

As Hopper waited for Jenny to return, he felt anxiety creeping into his chest. Doing the only thing he could think of, he pulled out his phone and began to text Joyce.

"Can u come back 4 a lil bit? Jen found something on the scan."

"On my way."

When Hopper looked up, he saw Jenny and Owens walking into the room with the scan. "Jim, are you in any pain?" Owens asked as he took off his stethoscope.

"No, can someone tell me what is going on please?" he asked nervously as Owens listened to his heart. When the doctor finished, Jenny began applying different electrode tabs to his chest before hooking them up to the monitor.

"Alright, Hop. You're having a mild silent heart attack. Nothing too bad, just try to relax a little bit." Owens glanced at the arrhythmia on the monitor before fishing a bottle out of the EKG cart.

"I'm gonna give you a dose of Nitroglycerin, that should take care of it. Open up," he said as he pulled the small tablet out of the bottle and placed it under Hopper's tongue.

As the pill dissolved in his mouth, Hopper watched as Owens sighed. "I know you don't want to Hop, but we're gonna have to put a

pacemaker in sooner or later. I'd prefer sooner rather than later"

"NO! No, absolutely not. I told you I wasn't going to do that!" Hopper yelled angrily as he sat up in his bed.

"Jim, you need to stay calm. I'm sorry but the luxury of a temper is not in your cards at the moment." Jenny said as her hand rested on his shoulder, trying to lower him back into bed.

"I told you, no pacemaker until I absolutely need it." he retorted, trying to lower his voice as best as possible.

"You absolutely need it, Jim! This is your third heart attack since August and we can't keep putting it off." Owens pleaded as Hopper crossed his arms angrily.

Just as Jenny was going to pull Sam out of the room, Hopper grunted and gripped his chest. As he coughed and groaned, the monitor began emitting an irregular tone.

"Hop, are you alright?" Jenny asked nervously as he started gasping for air. The room around him started going black as the pain ripped his chest apart. The only thoughts running through his head were about Joyce. How would she handle this? Would she be okay? Would she even care? He was gonna die right there in their room and he didn't even get to say goodbye.

"He's in V-fib! I need a crash cart in here!" Jenny shouted as she smashed her fist against the blue button on the wall. "Grab an Ambu bag and start compressions," she shouted as a dozen nurses and doctors ran into the room.

"Push an Epi, no time to lose here people," Owens ordered as he began the chest compressions.

"His pulse Ox is dropping!"

"Charge to 200!" Jenny yelled after lathering the paddles in the gel.

"Charged at 200." a random nurse called while everybody cleared away.

"Clear!" she called as she pressed the paddles to the stick pads. As the shock rippled through Jim's body, it nearly pulled him off the bed.

"Damn it, Hop! Not like this!" she cried as she watched the rhythm dip into a flatline. "Push another Epi!"

"Alright, charge to 300," Owens called as Jenny held the defibrillator paddles to Jim's chest.

"Hopper! NO!" Joyce shrieked as she saw them attempting to shock his heart again.

"Get her out of here!" Owens ordered.

"Charged at 300."

"Clear!"

The room was silent, except for the sound of Joyce's howling from the hall. The room waited for what felt like an eternity stuffed into three seconds. Suddenly, the deafening silence was filled with a weak pulse beeping from the monitor.

"Alright, page an O.R. He's getting that stupid pacemaker whether he likes it or not!" Owens said as everybody else released the breath they had been holding. One by one, they piled out of the room while they rolled his bed out with them.

Joyce was sitting against the hallway wall, her knees pressed to her chest as she tried to cope with the trauma she had just endured. She couldn't hear anything but her own heartbeat hammering in her chest. She felt paralyzed with fear as tears streamed down her cheeks.

They waited, they waited and waited and waited. Joyce, Phil, and Calvin sat in that damn waiting room for what felt like days. Joyce could only bring herself to pace around the room every fifteen minutes. She tried to sit still but the incessant foot tapping was driving the guys nuts. She felt like she was in a movie montage, the

cliché scene flipping as someone wandered around the waiting room. Only she was the one who couldn't set it to a faster motion.

"Joyce. Joyce?" the voice had to ask several times to catch her attention. "Hmm?"

"Phil and I are gonna head back to our room. Just send me a text when you get updated, alright?" Cal spoke in a calming voice as he pressed his palm to her shoulder.

"Yeah, yeah. Right. I'll let you know what they say." she replied as she dismissed them. Joyce could barely remember where she was, let alone that they were with her. She scrubbed her face anxiously as she sat down in the empty waiting room. Why was it taking so long?

"Joyce," Jenny said quietly as she walked into the waiting room. Joyce looked up at the nurse with red and puffy eyes and cheeks stained with dry tears.

"He's in recovery right now. We were able to get the pacemaker in and he's stable." the nurse's words were calm and quiet, she obviously knew Joyce was still frazzled from earlier.

"Good, good," Joyce spoke anxiously as she clicked her nails together.

"Do you wanna come back and see him?" Jenny asked softly.

Joyce nodded and shot out of her seat to follow her. As they maneuvered through the heavy double doors, Jenny led her to one of the surgical recovery rooms.

As Joyce walked in, she saw Hopper lying in bed. He was still sedated but he looked better than he did earlier. Joyce smiled softly as she saw the nasal cannula identical to hers, gripping his cheeks.

She quietly pulled a chair close and sat next to him. It felt like a heavy weight lifted off her shoulders as she saw him. He was alive and breathing, that was all she could ask for.

Joyce sat in that chair for another hour, her hand not leaving his for a single moment. Jim began to groan quietly as the anesthetic wore off.

"Joyce?" he whispered in his groggy state, trying to open his eyes to look at her.

"Shh, don't talk. I'm here." she smiled as her thumb stroked the top of his hand.

"What happened?" Hopper asked tiredly. He couldn't remember anything past arguing about a pacemaker with Owens.

"To be honest, I'm really not sure. All I know is that if you ever die on me again I will smack the fuck out of you." she laughed as she saw him give a weak smile.

"They put the pacemaker in, Hop," Joyce whispered as her smile dropped into a frown.

"I told them not to." came the groan of frustration.

"Well, you don't get much say in it when you're dead." she chuckled.
"Good news though, you're moving up the UNOS list."

"I still don't want the pacemaker." he sighed in frustration.

"I know you don't, but remember what we talked about? Keeping faith? This is just another part to that, alright?" she pulled her hand away, moving it to gently rub his forehead.

"Can I go back to my room yet?" his question made her giggle, she knew how much he hated bland hospital rooms. Hence why their room looked like a dorm room instead.

"Soon, I promise." Joyce smiled as she leaned forward towards him, resting her head on his hip.

Notes for the Chapter:

This was not my fav chapter :/

6. Merry November

Summary for the Chapter:

Joyce and Hopper make a decision that may come back to bite them

Within two weeks of the pacemaker ordeal, Jim was already back to being himself. His manipulative, erratic, self.

"We should get a Christmas tree," Hopper stated over the strum of his guitar. He was reclined in a comfy La-Z-Boy chair that Jenny had given him when they replaced the breakroom furniture.

"Hop, it's November." Joyce chuckled as she channel-surfed through their TV. "November 13th if I remember." Just as Hopper was about to retort, Jenny walked.

"Tank change, Joyce. You're running low." the nurse said as she carted in a new tank of oxygen. She knelt down beside Joyce's bed, accessing the tank that plugged into the tubes that always hugged Joyce's cheeks.

"Why don't you use the oxygen port on the wall for your cannula?" Hop asked confused as he watched Jenny fuss with the tubes.

"Because this way I don't have to keep changing them when I want to get up and go. This way, I can just have one all the time and not have to worry about pulling it right out of the wall." Joyce replied with a squeak of a laugh, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

"Wait, does this mean I could've had a portable heart monitor?" he asked as his attitude grew angry.

"Yes, you could've. But having you hooked up to the wall monitor made it harder for you to run off. You needed rest, Hop. I couldn't have you running around my hospital! You're lucky that I still don't make you wear one 24/7 after you went and died on me!" Jenny snapped with fake anger, eventually dissolving into laughter.

Hopper groaned in annoyance at the nurse's conniving actions. He

wouldn't admit it but she was probably right anyway. His first week and a half in the hospital was spent arguing with Jenny every time he tried to get out of bed.

"Jennifer, lemme ask you something," Hop said as he sat up in his chair.

"Shoot," she replied after finishing up with Joyce's oxygen.

"Where do you keep those mini Christmas trees that you put on the pediatrics floor?" his questions were finished off by the sound of Joyce's laughter at the subject.

"It's November, Hop. Way too early to decorate for the holidays." Jenny laughed as Joyce nodded in agreeance.

"Just tell me where you keep them so I won't have to go out and cut one down for myself. You wouldn't want me carrying a full-sized tree through the lobby when I can get a mini one for hassle-free, would you?" If there was one thing Hopper learned during his stay, it was the art of manipulation. Especially when Jenny knew he would absolutely go out of his way to bring a live tree up to his room.

She groaned completely annoyed. "Third floor, storage closet. We keep them down on the geriatrics floor because we can trust those guys not to riffle through them. Unlike you, James Charles." Jenny rolled her eyes before leaving the room.

"C'mon Joycie, we're gonna go get ourselves a Christmas tree." Hop grinned as he tucked his guitar back into its case. Without qualms, Joyce jumped out of bed and dragged her tank behind her.

"Ugh God, it smells like feces and death down here." Hopper plugged his nose as Joyce walked beside him.

"We're both gonna end up here someday, Hop. Better get used to it." Joyce chuckle, trying to keep up with him as he searched the halls.

"Nope, I'm going out like Evil Kenevil or I'm not going out at all," he

replied before he came across the storage closet.

"It's locked, let's just go back to the room and wait until it's *actually* Christmas time." Joyce pleaded with a short laugh.

"Snatched this from Jenny's desk," Hop replied as he held up her key card. Joyce made a mental note to just start expecting this kind of stuff from him. He swiped the key card and gave her a shit-eating grin when the lock blinked green.

As Hopper walked around the storage room, Joyce picked through the Christmas decorations. "All of the trees are one size. Just pick one and we can go," she said as she picked up a few small boxes of ornaments and garland.

Hauling two medium-sized trees over his shoulder, Hop held the door open so she could head out before him.

"We only need one tree, why'd you grab two?" she asked with her eyes widened. He looked like a damn lumberjack walking through the hallways with two trees over his shoulders.

"One for our room, one for the roof. I don't trust Cal and Phil to bring one up themselves," he answered as they pressed for the elevator and waited.

"You really shouldn't be lifting that stuff. You just had surgery." she laughed as she looked up at him.

"Nah, I'm fine," he replied as the elevator dinged.

"What are you two doing?" Owens asked incredulously as he stepped out of the elevator.

"Jenny let us do it!" both of them replied in unison, looking like two kids who got caught with their hands in the cookie jar.

"Get back to your rooms before you both flatline." Owens sighed, rolling his eyes as he walked past the two patients.

Joyce giggled furiously as Hopper walked around with ornaments hanging from his ears. "You're so stupid!" she cried through hysterical laughter. Hopper smiled as he pushed a strand of her hair behind her ear, pulling off one of the ornaments and setting its hook around the loop of hair.

"There. Now we're matching." he laughed as a goofy smile took over her expression. Christmas music surrounded their room throughout the day of decorating. Garland hung in the doorway and shelving while their small Christmas tree stood proudly next to the window.

"Why did you want to decorate so early, Hop?" Joyce asked quietly as her smile softly turned to concern. He was standing toe to toe with her while his hand stayed gently placed on her shoulder.

"Becuase... we really don't know how long we'll be here. A new heart and lungs could walk in tomorrow and we'd be out by Christmas. This seemed like the perfect timing." Hop replied quietly with a small smile. It was probably the most intelligent thing Joyce had heard him say yet.

"That's... really sweet." Surprise was plaguing her sweetened tone as her eyelashes fluttered. She could see Hopper nervously shrug under her gaze.

"Have I taken you up to the roof of the hospital yet?" he asked, changing the subject as quickly as possible. Joyce shook her head as her smile grew bigger. "Let's go up there right now. The skyline always looks pretty around this time of night," he suggested as he picked up the tree he planned to set up there.

Joyce followed him out of their room as they made their way to the elevator. She really didn't know what to expect, he had talked about the roof like it was his bachelor pad more often than he talked about his own room.

The elevator sounded, letting them know they were at the top of the building. "Feast your eyes upon 'Lugar de Hopper!' he laughed excitedly as she walked out onto the roof.

"Wow! I certainly wasn't expecting this." Joyce admitted with a

shocked chuckle. One of the main thoughts running through her head was '*How the hell did he get a couch up here?*'

"Do you like it? I know it isn't the best but its a pretty nice change of scenery." he motioned for her to look around the rest of the setup. She could definitely see why he enjoyed it up there, fresh air and the night sky without having to see it through glass panes? This was heaven for any long-term patient.

"It *is* pretty amazing." Joyce chuckled in disbelief as she plopped down on the couch next to him. "Nice IV poles." she laughed as she saw four of them holding up string lights.

"That was all Jenny. She let us borrow them when we were setting it all up. We come up here sometimes, the guys and I. We drink beer and play games, it's a nice escape." Hop said as he cracked a beer that he grabbed from the cooler after handing her one.

"I can see so. Took you long enough to show me this place. Do you only show this to the pretty girls?" she teased as she saw his cheeks go red. Taking a small sip from the bottle, she watched him shift in his seat.

"No. I was gonna take you up here a few weeks ago but then your cough started to get worse and I figured we oughta wait until that cleared up a bit. I didn't know if it could make it worse. Then I had surgery so that put it to a halt too." he replied sheepishly, scratching the back of his neck.

Before the moment got any more awkward, Phil and Calvin stepped out onto the roof. "You enjoying my beer?" Cal joked as he walked over to Joyce and Hopper.

"Yeah, nothing tastes better than stale 7-11 Bud Light." Hop laughed as he chucked them each their own. The two of them slid into the separate lawn chairs next to the couch while they both bit the cap off the bottle.

"Well, that stale Bud Light cost us twenty bucks for a thirty pack so I'll be waiting for your contribution," Calvin replied as Jim gave him the finger.

"So Joyce, what do you think of it up here?" Phil asked while Calvin and Hop started wrestling over beer money.

"It's pretty bitchin' up here, I'm surprised you could pull it off." she laughed as she took another sip of her drink. She felt out of place, her forte was more of coffee and a book but a little beer never hurt anybody.

Three hours later the four of them were still on the roof of the hospital, only far drunker. It was probably after the chugging contest when Joyce started to loosen up a bit. She could feel herself coming undone as the alcohol worked through her system, breaking a lot of the tension she felt.

Joyce could barely remember the last time she got drunk. It was probably when she was about 24 years old and in the midst of a divorce from her ex-husband, Lonnie. It was nice to be able to be fun drunk, not broken-hearted-wallowing-in-pity-drunk.

"J-Joyce, Jo-Jo." Hopper slurred his words as he laughed. He pulled out a pack of cigarettes and chuckled. "Yo-you want one?"

"You want me to smoke a cigarette? I have ... uh... Cys-Cystic Fibrosis. If UNOS finds out that I that in my system, they can take me off the list." Joyce's eyes were wide with drunken shock as she saw him light one for himself.

"You're so far up that damn list that UNOS would give you lungs even after you're dead." Hop laughed with the other guys as he handed her the cigarette.

"You can't let that tube thing stop ya' all the time." he slurred as he pointed to the oxygen cannula she was still wearing. "It'll be out of your system before the next labs too. It won't hurt to t-try it."

"You sure?" she asked in a whisper as her fingertips grazed the cigarette. She knew it was a bad idea but the alcohol in her system had clouded her mind into a hazy fog. She saw how Hopper lived, it

seemed fun. He never let anything get in his way, so why should she?

Joyce pressed the cigarette between her lips and took a long drag before nearly coughing her lungs up. As she continued to test out the new waters, Hop looked over and saw Phil passed out in his chair.

Grabbing the nearest empty can, Hopper threw it at Phil's head. "BONK! That beer went right to your head." he and Calvin laughed as Phil only stirred in his booze-induced sleep.

Hopper and Joyce were sound asleep back in their rooms, not completely sure how they got there either. Joyce was slumped over her blankets while Jim was barely on his bed at all.

"Jenny, before you go home will you take Joyce's labs? She has chest P.T. in the morning and I'd rather not do it then." Owens asked as he walked past the nurse's station.

"Consider it done. Night Doc." Jen smiled as she waved Sam goodnight. Pulling herself out of the desk chair, she went off to retrieve the labs kit. Walking into room 240, she was hit with the heavy scent of beer.

"Jesus Christ you two, it smells like a brewery in here." but no answer came back, just two drunken snores from opposite sides of the room. Jenny grabbed a tube from the kit and clicked it into Joyce's IV.

"I can't decide if I should give you a rally bag or just let you deal with the hangover in the morning as a punishment for being so stupid," Jen whispered as she finished drawing the blood for testing.

7. Ten Steps in Ten Different Directions

Summary for the Chapter:

Angst ahead!

The knock on their door startled the silence between the two patients. Joyce was laid back in her bed with her nose into a book when Dr. Owens walked in, a chart in his hand and a grave expression.

Before either of them could ask him why he was there, he glanced at Hopper. "May I have a minute with Joyce alone please?" Sam asked politely. Jim cocked his head with curiosity before stepping out without argument.

"What's wrong?" Joyce felt anxiety rush over her body like a tidal wave. Owens pulled a chair over to the side of her bed while she sat up and waited for him.

"Joyce..." As he started, the tone of his voice only made her blood go cold. "UNOS is... UNOS is taking you off the top of the list for the double lung transplant." his voice was cold and broken up, but Joyce could barely hear him.

The room started to spin and she could no longer hear anything he was saying to her. She couldn't tell if her heart had stopped dead in her chest or if it was beating all too fast. No tears were able to fall from her eyes as it was all too much to process in the moment. They couldn't take her off the top, she had been on the top for so long! Thousands of emotions and thoughts ran through her mind at lightning speed.

When her vocal chords caught up with her brain, she finally spoke.

"Why?" Her voice trembled with fear and anger. Why would they do this to her? She had been on that list since she was 8 years old and it had taken this long to get to the top of the list!

"They found nicotine and tobacco in your system when they ran your

last blood test. Joyce, how did this happen? You knew that they would take you down if this happened." Owens looked just as upset as she did, but the worst part wasn't the sadness. He looked disappointed in her more than anything. He had been her doctor since she was in diapers, he knew how important this was to her.

"I made a mistake! All my life I've had to be nothing but careful about every move I make, I fuck up once and it all goes down the drain? This isn't fair!" She howled as tears poured down her cheeks.

"Joyce, you didn't answer me. How did this happen?" Sam set his chart down and scrubbed his face with his palms. The truth was, he had known for a week about UNOS' decision. He had spent every minute he could trying to battle it down but it was set in stone.

"It was half of a cigarette! Hopper told me that it would be out of my system before the next labs. I didn't do it to be stupid and sabotage the transplant, I did it because I'm sick of not being able to do anything! This is the shit I get when I don't walk in a perfectly straight line right?" Joyce huffed angrily through the tears. She threw her portable oxygen backpack over her shoulder and rushed out.

"Joyce, what happened?" Hopper asked as he saw her pile out of the door. "*Fuck off,*" she mumbled silently as she ran off. Usually, she would've run right into his arms but she couldn't stand to see him; not now. Hop just watched as she pushed beside him and disappeared into the elevator.

"What the hell happened?" Jim asked with his voice shallow as he looked over to Owens.

Sam could only give him a disappointed look. "Let her be, just for a little while."

Hopper could only sit and stare out the window, the anxiety about Joyce was reaching an all-time high in his mind. Was she okay? What happened? Why was she angry? He didn't dare ask Jenny because the odds were she wouldn't tell him anyway.

As Hopper stared at the rain pouring over the city, Powell knocked on his door quietly. "What do you want?" he barked, without dragging his eyes away from the scene before him.

"Joyce is in some hot water, Hop." Calvin sighed as he sat down in the chair across from Hopper's bed.

Jim shot up with his eyes blazing full of worry. "Why? What happened?" his jaw was clenched tightly as if he was preparing to absorb some kind of shock.

"That cigarette you pretty much guilted her into smoking? UNOS found it in her labs and they're knocking her off the top of the list." Calvin's face stayed neutral through his words even though he wasn't thrilled with Jim.

"You've gotta be fucking kidding me? Tell me that isn't true." Hopper's expression was one of only pure horror. Had he done this to her?

"Sorry to burst your pity bubble amigo, but yeah... it's true," Powell replied with a bastardizing look.

"Where is she? I have to go talk to her," he asked frantically as he started to get out of bed.

"Good luck with that. Jenny is probably hiding her somewhere. Best let her be for the night." Powell stood up and patted Jim's shoulder as he was headed towards the door. "I think you might've really messed up this time, Hop."

Hop's heart felt like it was in his stomach as he slowly sank back down into his bed. Joyce was going to hate him for this.

With tears stinging her eyes, Joyce sat on the floor, leaning against the wall of the elevator. Her hand rose above her head each time the lift stopped, smacking a random button above her. She didn't even know what floor she was on anymore and the braille of each elevator button was imprinted on her fingers from her continuous traveling.

She had nowhere to turn this time.

She knew she had to go back to her room at some point, but 'some point' didn't have to be now. Truthfully, she'd rather sleep in a cramped waiting room chair than go back to room 240. For now, she was going to keep riding the empty elevator up and down the floors.

When the 145th fifteen-second elevator ride ended with a small 'ding', she saw familiar white nurses shoes step inside. Jenny sighed and slumped down next to Joyce on the floor of the lift. Her patient was clearly zoned out, earbuds stuffed into her ears with the same song on repeat.

"That's a good song." Jenny whispered as she saw Joyce's phone set to *'Used to Love You Sober'* by Kane Brown. Her words didn't phase Joyce, she continued to stare at the silver walls with tears welled in her eyes.

"It's okay to be angry, Joyce" she sighed as she patted her back. Joyce's lip quivered with hurt before she leaned her head on Jenny's shoulder, beginning to sob harder than ever.

"It isn't fair!" she cried. "I made one mistake! I wouldn't even be in this situation if it weren't for Hopper!" Joyce spat his name out like it was poison on her lips, but Jenny just kept hugging her tightly.

"I know, honey. I know." Jenny frowned as she let Joyce cry in her arms. She felt helpless, there was nothing she could do to take the pain away for Joyce. She could only let herself sit in the elevator while her patient cried in her lap.

When Joyce was finally able to pull herself up, it was 2:47 in the morning. She peeked her head through the window of her room, making sure Hopper was asleep. He was laying on his side, facing the window with his headphones in. Joyce quietly snuck in, closing the curtain off between their bed.

She sighed softly as she laid down in bed. She had an alarm set to

wake her up a few minutes before Hopper would wake up. All she could hope for was that she'd be up and out before he would know she was back.

8. Guilty Silence and Happy Endings

Summary for the Chapter:

Joyce and Hopper finally realize what has been in front of them the entire time.

"She didn't come back last night." Hopper sighed as he stared out the window. The rain was still drizzling over Hawkins and it seemed like the perfect mood.

"Man, you gotta stop wallowing in your own sadness, Hop. It won't get you anywhere." Phil replied, clearly absorbed in his Xbox game as the controller rattled in his hand. It was taking Jim everything not to get up and punch the asshole in the head but he was too tired to care anyway.

"She'll come back, don't worry," Calvin added as he sat next to Callahan, also enveloped into the video game.

"But what if she doesn't? What if she moves rooms?" Hopper groaned as the simple thought made his stomach twist into unruly knots.

"Well, she'd have to come back and get her stuff. You'd see her then and you'd get to talk to-FUCK YOU, CAL! THAT'S CHEATING!" Phil shouted angrily, punching his best friend who was laughing.

"So supportive, you two," Jim mumbled under his breath.

He just wanted to know if she was okay, even though she clearly wasn't. Every moment with dumb and dumber only made him miss Joyce more. Just to hear her laugh or see her smile, he'd give anything.

"Hop!" a voice called him back to reality. As he realized it was Phil, he sat up and glared at him. "What?" he grumbled.

"Are you doing the volunteer thing on the PEDS floor today? Powell and I are heading down there soon," he asked as he shut the Xbox off.

"I don't think so. Too tired." Jim replied, rolling back over in bed.

"Well, if you need us you know where we'll be." Calvin sighed as he and Phil left Jim to be alone.

He didn't want to move, let alone put on a face to go color with a bunch of kids. No, he wanted to sit and stare out the window while doing exactly what Phil told him not to; Wallow in his own pity. He had hundreds of better things to do, none that he could think of on the spot but they were there. Hopper knew that trying to find Joyce to apologize would be a futile attempt. Clearly, when she spat 'fuck you' at him, she meant it.

When he finally dragged his ass out of bed, Hopper made his way to floor 17 to watch the Pediatric volunteer day. Practically dragging his feet as he walked, he came across a big glass window, revealing the playroom.

Dozens of little kids ran around with the older patients following them. He could see Powell and Callahan playing board games with a couple kids as he looked around the room.

Then, there she was. Wavy auburn locks laying gently on her shoulders while a yellow mask hugged her face. A little girl was sitting in her lap as Joyce read her a story. Hopper's heart melted as he could see the smile on Joyce's face even through the mask. At least she was alright.

She looked so happy with the kids, several of them sitting around her while she read a Doctor Suess book. A sad smile took over Hop's face as he watched her. She looked so beautiful right then and there, like a goddess in a yellow scrub gown.

Hopper could've sworn he locked eyes with her for a single second. One stupid, small, finite second before that invisible smile became an obvious frown. He could hear his heart shatter in his ears as she looked back down at the book as if he weren't even there.

"She just needs time." a voice startled him from behind.

"I know, Jennifer. That's why I'm not bothering her. I just came down to watch what was happening." he sighed, not even bothering to look at the nurse.

"She looks happy. She seems to love the kids." Jenny said with a small smile tugging at the side of her lip.

"Yeah," he replied breathlessly. He couldn't take his eyes off of her. It had nothing to do with lighting, or how her hair gently caressed her shoulders, she just looked beautiful.

"Time, Hopper. Time." she sighed, glancing at him out of the corner of her eye.

"I hurt her, Jen. Time won't do shit. She has every right to be royally pissed the fuck off at me." Hop groaned as he scrubbed his hands over his face. He knew Jenny was right, but the headstrong ego he had spent so much time building up was still echoing in his mind.

"You're right, she does. But she won't be forever. She's the swing-set, Jim. You're just the kid that falls." Jenny said, patting his back before departing.

"Wh-what the hell does that even mean?" Hopper mumbled before leaving towards the opposite hallway.

Joyce grumbled as she saw Calvin trailing towards her in the empty cafeteria. Was it that hard just to have some peace and quiet?

"If he sent you here to talk to me, go the hell away." Joyce groaned as she gripped her coffee cup tighter. Cal looked like he had his tail tucked between his legs with shame on behalf of Jim.

"He didn't send me here, I came to talk to you," Powell said as he sat down in the seat next to her. There were a few moments of solitary silence that she knew wasn't going to last.

"He needs you, Jo. He won't admit it so I will. I know he made a big mistake but he feels terrible." he sighed as he gripped his own coffee

cup.

"Do you know, Calvin? Do you know how big of a mistake that was? I know I'm the one who looks dumb here and I know I am as much to blame as he is but he is the one who got me into this trouble. I don't know if you've ever tried, but you can't say no to him. It's impossible and he knows it! He gives you this look in his eyes and it's like being in a trance of persuasion. Not only am I embarrassed because now my whole team of doctors think I'm dumb, but I feel stupid. I feel like the biggest idiot on the planet! I wouldn't be in this situation if it weren't him and his 'mistake!'"

Joyce felt like she was going to break down and cry. She knew how dumb the whole situation looked. A Cystic Fibrosis patient getting caught after smoking a cigarette. She was angry with herself just as much as she was angry with Jim, she trusted him! All those times he watched her in a ball of pain, she felt used. He was her friend, he wasn't supposed to convince her to do stupid stuff! He was supposed to talk her out of it! The fact that she was best friends with him only made the wound dig deeper. They were supposed to look out for each other, take care of each other, fend and fight for each other!

But it hurt more because she... she loved him. It came down on her like a pile of bricks. Joyce loved Jim Hopper. She didn't know when or how it happened, but it did. It did and she wanted to hate him and herself for it too. She didn't want to love him. He was rough around the edges, he was childish and stupid, he was a ridiculous man but she loved him more than life itself. He was funny, he was nice, he cared for her, and he always made sure she was okay. Every flashback of him all but declaring his love for her ran through her head. He was stupid but she was so damn in love with him that it made it all hurt even worse.

"Joyce..." Calvin interrupted her train of thought as he tapped her shoulder. She didn't know how long her mind had been occupied but now she just wanted to be alone.

"Go away," she whispered as her words bared no venom. She stared down at her coffee cup as she tried to fight back the tears that welled in her eyes.

"Joyce, you have to talk to him. He misses you!" Calvin said as Joyce looked up at him furiously.

"**GO AWAY!**" she flared angrily before bursting out into a coughing fit. She usually knew better than to raise her voice, knowing it only aggravated her lungs.

"Alright, deep breaths. Don't get yourself too riled up." Calvin's words earned him an angry glare from Joyce as she continued coughing. "Alright, sorry." he apologized. Once he made sure she was able to breathe, he apologized again and left her by herself.

"Hopper!" Phil yelled as he nearly skid past room 240 with Calvin in tow. He had barely moved since the last time they saw him; right after they came back from volunteering. Only this time, he looked even worse.

"What?" he groaned as he sat up in his bed. He had seen enough of these two already, couldn't they just let him be?

"Joyce, She's on the roof right now." Callahan gave a childish grin as he spoke.

"So?" Hop rolled his eyes.

"She's alone." Calvin raised his brows as if Jim was supposed to be catching onto something.

"Okay?" now he was getting really annoyed.

"Go talk to her, you idiot!" the two shouted in unison.

"She doesn't want to talk to me! I can't just waltz up there and corner her like that!" Jim replied, throwing his hands up in the air,

"GO!" they shouted again, this time loud enough to convince him to go,

Hopper pushed through the doors to the roof of the hospital. Joyce was standing in the rain as she looked out over the busy city. It would've been a beautiful scene of the night skyline if the most important person in his life wasn't standing there, beyond furious with him. He ran in front of her but her eyes didn't move towards him.

"Joyce, please talk to me. I can't handle the silent treatment." Hopper pleaded helplessly. Joyce could only stand there, arms crossed angrily over her chest. Her eyes were glued to the view past his shoulder, she just couldn't make eye contact with him. Her entire body was soaking wet from the rainstorm that poured over them.

"Joyce, I am begging you, please talk to me. I'm so sorry about all of this. I never meant for this to happen!" Hopper looked like he was close to getting on his knees and pleading with her. Anger flooded through her at an impeccable speed from his words.

"*You're sorry?* Hopper, you just don't get it, do you? You cost me my transplant! This could cost me my entire life! You really won't like the silent treatment when I'm intubated, will you? What happens when I miss my transplant just by a little and I don't make it? Because of a cigarette, Hopper! I know you like to let loose a little, I know you don't let your illness stop you but you don't realize that those boundaries keep you alive! It's not laughing and it's not living like a normal person that keeps you alive, it's boundaries! Boundaries you can't break!" Joyce spat her harsh words nose to nose with him. Her face beet red with anger while her heart pounded.

"I'm sorry," Hopper whispered with tears welling up in his eyes. He couldn't stand to see her so upset and angry. The emotional pain of watching her break felt like a physical stab in the chest.

"I am killing myself to live! It's like this never-ending vicious cycle of trying to survive but knives are being thrown at me in every direction. I'm running a parkour but I have no clue where the end is, or if it's even there! Every damn light at the end of the tunnel seems to be the headlight of a train, Hop, and I'm just so damn sick and tired of being sick and tried!" Joyce's anger dissolved into pure hurt.

Tears and raindrops were streaming down her cheeks, puddling along her oxygen cannula with each second passing.

Hopper softly pressed his palms to her cheeks, cradling her head while they both cried. "I'm so sorry." He sobbed softly "I never meant for this to happen."

Just as Joyce opened her mouth to speak, his lips came crashing down onto hers in earnest. Her mind immediately went numb to everything else as her arm snuck around and pulled him closer. Their kiss started out small but as their own tears continued to drop with the rain, it only grew more intense. There was no bumping of teeth and awkwardly trying to breathe, just perfect synchronicity between their lips.

"What are we doing?" She asked quietly as they pulled apart. Her arm was still hooked around his back while he continued to cradle her rain-covered face.

"Breaking boundaries." He muttered before diving back into her lips.

Notes for the Chapter:

I'm a sucker for some kissing in the rain ;)

9. One Thing After Another

Summary for the Chapter:

Joyce starts to rapidly decline

Notes for the Chapter:

The song that they are singing is 'I Will Spend My Whole Life Loving You' By Kina Grannis and Imaginary Future

"It had been a week since Hopper had finally kissed her. Joyce was curled against his side as he strummed his guitar. His arm was around her back, as he held the instrument over her. The two of them were lying back in his bed as they sang quietly together.

"August afternoon

I can picture you

Walking with your father at your side

In the summer heat

California speaks

Softly like she's making up her mind"

Joyce smiled gently as she sang along with him, she knew his guitar talent was good but she was surprised at how nice his singing voice was. It had been a rough night for her. Hopper had stayed up with her all week as each night turned into a worse coughing fit than the last. Her eyes felt sleepy but she couldn't pass up the opportunity to sing along with him.

"Baby, isn't it crazy that we are born only to die?"

'But lately, I've been counting my stars'

'Cause I will spend my whole life loving you"

She was nestled in the gap of his arm and chest, her arm hugging his torso softly as he continued strumming the guitar. When she first came to Hawkins Hospital, she expected to be homesick the entire time. She waited to catch herself counting down the days until she could return home, expecting it to be at any time. She never did though, not once. She felt more home here than she ever did in her own home.

"She's supposed to have Chest P.T. in fifteen minutes, I don't have the heart to go in there and interrupt them," Jenny said with a smile as she and Owens watched through 240's window from the nurses' station.

"We're gonna have to go in there sooner or later," Sam replied with a cheesy smile.

"Not yet. Just let them sit for a few more minutes," she whispered as she crossed her arms, smiling bigger than she had in a long time. It warmed her heart to see Jim happy. When he had first been admitted, Jenny remembered how quiet and angry he was. He didn't talk to other people, and when he did it was usually just retorts stemming from the anger.

"She's been getting worse each day. I've been trying to talk to UNOS about it but it's like talking to a brick wall. O'Bannon from her CF team bumped her oxygen up and decided to try a stronger dose of Ceftazidime but there isn't much difference." Owens sighed.

"Should we move her to isolation?" Jenny asked with a concerned frown.

"Nobody else on the floor has CF so she can't catch something that would be severely threatening, and I think Hopper would kill us if we did move her to AIIR." Owens chuckled as he watched Hop lean over and kiss Joyce's forehead.

"They've been inseparable all week. Crazy kids in love." Jenny

snickered as she nudged Sam on the shoulder.

"Jennifer, you're only three years older than them. They aren't really kids anymore." Owens laughed as he took a sip from his coffee cup.

"They're both 27 and I'm 30. Anybody younger than me is a kid. I'll give them a few more minutes and then I'll send P.T. in." she laughed as she went back to typing up charts.

Joyce had been able to convince Hop to spend time with his friends for a little while during her chest P.T. She had even seen the sly smile that Claudia gave when Jim pecked her forehead goodbye. Eventually, Jenny came in to help Joyce finish her second part of therapy, relieving Claudia from her duty.

"How are you feeling today, Jo?" Jen asked as she helped buckle the clearance vest around Joyce's torso.

"Tired. Trying not to act like it because I don't want to upset Hop. Just kinda worn down, y'know?" she gave a small smile as Jenny nodded.

"Yeah, I know. You're running a slight fever so after you finish your neb and vest, I'll leave you to rest. I think Jim has been itching to go on a beer run with the guys so that might give you some time to recharge." Jen smiled as she handed Joyce the nebulizer.

As Jenny dimmed the lights for her, she left Joyce to try to rest while she finished up her airway clearance. She hated to admit it but Joyce looked rough. Her lungs sounded rougher than they had yet and she was quickly losing color in her skin.

Owens was standing outside of the nurses' station, waiting for Jenny to finish up. He could see the faux smile drop into a look of worry as the nurse stepped out.

"I think you should order a more wide-spectrum panel for her. My gut is telling me that this isn't Pseudomonas." Jenny sighed as her stomach felt like it was in knots. She hadn't seen Joyce rapidly

decline like this before, her instincts told her that something was off.

"What's her temp?" Owens asked as he clutched his clipboard.

"Touching 102, she's pale, and her lungs sound like fingernails scratching on vinyl. I'm worried, Doc." she scratched her forehead with a deep sigh.

"Alright, give me about a half hour to talk to the lab and send the scripts up to order." Owens groaned as he walked away.

Jenny was right, something about this was extremely unsettling.

An hour later, Jenny began to walk into room 240 to draw Joyce's labs.

"Joy—Oh sweet Jesus. Someone page Owens and prep an ISO room!" Jenny called into the hall before rushing to her bedside. Blood stained Joyce's lips and pillowcase and her breaths were clearly light and uneven. Dozens of nurses and doctors began piling into the room, voices loudly overlapping each other.

"Alright, someone get me an intubation tray! Call radiology and have them meet us down on the ISO floor. Page whoever is on call for Infectious Disease." Jenny ordered as she ripped the suction tubes from the wall, clearing her airway as best as possible.

After Joyce was as stable as possible, Jenny and the team rushed her up to floor 30. Doctor Owens ran out of the elevator just as they maneuvered Joyce's bed into her isolation room.

"What the hell happened?" Sam shouted while Jenny ripped off her used scrub gown.

Jim was heading back towards his room with a case of beer in his hand when Sam and Jenny approached him.

"Hop, we need to talk. It's Joyce." Owens said with sympathy in his eyes. Jim immediately felt a cold rush of fear run through his veins. As he looked behind the doctor, he could see his room was covered in plastic wrapping and caution tape.

10. Traumatic Tragedy

Summary for the Chapter:

Hopper realizes this is going to be a lot harder than he expected

Some say that tragedy should be utilized as a source of strength and some say people are born with tragedy in their blood. It follows them around, changing them forever, little by little. But that's the thing about tragedy, it takes two.

"What'd you mean you sent Joyce to isolation? She was fine!" Hopper raged with both anger and sadness.

"She started running a high fever when we checked on her. She was lethargic and barely conscious, she had started to cough up blood before we came in." Jenny sighed as she looked at her side to Owens.

"Hop, she contracted Tuberculosis. We had a patient come to the ER with it but the CDC cleared the hospital. Others weren't infected but because she has Cystic Fibrosis, she took a harder hit." Sam frowned sympathetically as he waited for Hopper to speak.

It felt like all the words he wanted to say were ripped right from his chest. The room was spinning as everything processed through his head. With his heartbeat radiating in his ears like a drum, Hopper felt like the room was going in slow motion.

"Is she gonna be alright?" he asked, trying his best not to choke up.

"She's sedated and intubated right now. We're running tests to clarify the specific strain of the bacteria. Until then, we can't push many antibiotics." Jenny answered with an attempt at a straight face.

"How do you not already know which type it was? Whoever came in must've been tested." Hop felt anger replacing his sadness at the negligence before him. They were wasting time!

"I'm not really supposed to be telling you this, but the person who came in had been carrying two completely different strains. They had recently traveled out of the country and contracted both so it's a shot in the dark if we treat it right now. It shouldn't be much longer from the lab but it's best if we just wait." The look in Owen's eyes nearly crushed Hopper's already sick heart.

"How did this happen?" Jim asked, not bothering to wipe away the tear that streamed down his cheek.

"The patient came in a few weeks ago. Like I said, the CDC came in and cleared the building and declared it safe. We have a ventilation system that runs the contaminated air to the roof where the filtering takes care of the bacteria. Because yours and Joyce's room is near the duct, there is more likelihood that a small amount of the contamination can seep through." Owens replied before Jenny continued for him.

"Odds are that Joyce came in contact with the disease around that time but Tuberculosis is tough, it can hide in the body for a while before it's even noticeable. There are only a few in this hospital who haven't been vaccinated. Joyce was one of them." the nurse felt herself anxiously chewing on her lip as the three spoke.

"I have to see her, please let me see her." Hop cried, his eyes glazing over with burning tears.

"Hop, we can't. Not while the CDC is hanging around. It's not safe for you either." Owens sighed, wishing that just once, Hopper would listen to him.

"I don't give a fuck about me! I just want to see her." he bit back tears as he felt his chest heave.

"I'm sorry, Jim. It's just not gonna happen right now." Owens sighed, leaving him and Jenny to themselves.

"Jennifer, please! It's been two days. You have to let me see her!"

Hopper pleaded as he followed her to the nurses' station. Not a single moment of him being in her presence was wasted without him begging to see Joyce.

"Don't ask me again, Hop." Jen sighed as she picked a few charts off the desk and tucked them under her arm.

"Why?" he asked, feeling as defeated as could be.

"Because if you ask me one more time I might just say yes." she sighed as she pursed her lips, watching Hopper's face light up like a Christmas tree.

"Well, what are we doing sitting around like Phil after a pot brownie? Let's go!" Hop shouted as he ran towards the elevator.

"Hopper, wait. I should warn you... she doesn't look good. She doesn't look like Joyce right now." Jen's semi-smile quickly faded into a sympathetic frown when she realized Hopper's excitement wouldn't be as merited once he saw her.

Jim stopped dead in his tracks and swiveled on his foot. "She'll always be Joyce to me. No matter how she looks, no matter how she feels, no matter what," he reassured before heading back to the elevator.

The ride to the 30th floor was an anxious one for Jim. The air in the enclosed lift felt like it was being sucked out with every waking second that they climbed.

Finally, the elevator sounded a soft 'ding' as the doors opened. Every wall and floor was blindingly white, like a set for a horror movie.

"Alright, I can't let you go in yet but there's a window to her room and you'll be able to see her," Jenny said as she led him down the horrifying corridor.

When they finally came across Joyce's room, Hopper felt like he was going to throw up.

"Oh my God, Jenny she looks dead. She looks dead!" he panicked when he saw her lying there, her skin as white as the walls and

hooked to a ventilator.

"It's alright, Hop! She's not dead, see?" Jenny pulled Hopper closer to her, trying to calm him down. "Look, she's not dead. Take a deep breath, alright? I can't have you up here if you're gonna panic."

Jim stood there, trying to breathe calmly as he watched Joyce's chest rise and fall. She looked lonely, locked up all alone in there. Pinching the bridge of his nose, he tried to fight the tears that threatened to fall.

"I've never seen her without her oxygen cannula," he whispered with a nervous chuckle. In all honesty, he missed the little clear tube that usually wrapped under her nose. She was still beautiful even without it though.

"She looks dead, Jen." he said breathlessly as he turned to her, a tear breaking loose from the welling in his eyes.

"We just need to give her lungs some time to recover while the antibiotics work. We won't give up on her, not on my watch." Jen replied, patting his back as he cried.

Three days. It had been three days since Jim had first seen Joyce through the thick glass pane. Three days and there hadn't been much improvement. Some small things maybe, but not much. She had been fighting the intubation even in a chemical coma, trying to breathe on her own. That made Jim's heart swell, she was his strong girl. But other than that, a total of five days and there wasn't much excitement. Jim had begun letting himself into the isolation room, dressing up in the scrappy yellow scrubs and HEPA masks.

"Hopper, you can't stay much longer. You aren't supposed to be here in the first place." Owens sighed as he walked into Joyce's isolation unit. Through the heavy masking that he wore, he could see Hopper had been crying.

"I'm not leaving," Jim said flatly, barely looking up at the doctor.

Since the moment he walked into the room, his hand hadn't left Joyce's.

"You have five more minutes while I check her over, then we both leave." Owens' voice didn't sound nearly as strict as he would've liked it too, but he couldn't bring himself to further upset Hopper.

"I can't leave her here, Doc. She'll be lonely." Jim watched as Joyce's chest rose and dropped with each ventilated breath. She still looked lifeless to him. As if it were just a corpse in front of him.

"She isn't even awake, Hopper. She won't know if you're here or not." The words barely slipped out of Owen's mouth before Hopper snapped his head towards the doctor.

"Of course she will! Did you not know that a person can still hear when they're in a coma? I'd know, I've been. I'm not leaving her." His tone calmed down as quickly as it raised. He didn't want her to hear him yelling.

"You need rest, Hopper. You've barely left the floor for days and now you're laying around in an infected isolation room." Owens replied as he listened to Joyce's heartbeat. He didn't need another patient in this condition, let alone any at all.

Hopper stared silently down at his yellow sterile gown while his thumb rubbed the top of Joyce's hand. "How bad is it?" He asked after several long moments.

"Jim, I can't discuss thi—" Owens started before being interrupted.

"How bad?" Hopper grit out his words through his teeth as he saw the doctor shift his weight from foot to foot.

"Well, usually this wouldn't infect someone so quickly, but given that her immune system is so weak, it took over rapidly. She wasn't vaccinated against the illness as a child because her parents were against the idea. After her diagnosis, she grew rapidly ill and her team feared that it would only add insult to injury to vaccinate. That's pretty much the late 80's right there." Owens looked at Hopper with his eyes growing sadder. "Let's step outside."

Hopper nodded defeatedly as he rose out of his chair. Avoiding tubes and wires as best he could, he leaned down and kissed her forehead through the mask that hugged his face. "I'll be back soon. I promise." He softly whispered in her ear before following Owens through the sterilization airlock chamber.

As he stood in front of the glass window to Joyce's room, Owens waited for him to finish removing his gear. Hopper finished undressing his sterile gown and walked back to the doctor, not nearly as prepared for what Owens had to say as he'd like to be.

"How much longer will she have to be intubated?" Hop asked after a long moment of silence. Seeing Joyce through the glass window was just as bad as seeing her up close, but now he felt miles away from her.

"I don't know, Hop. We have to give her body a chance to rest and heal before we rush it. It's difficult when she isn't responding to antibiotics. As of now, we have to follow the CDC's orders and wait." Owens could see his words were ripping Hopper apart. The callous and careless man he had been treating for several months was changing right before his eyes.

"What if lungs come in while she's still out? Will they go to her?" Hopper asked as he stared into her room.

"I'm not sure she would surv... The board will have to discuss whether or not she can handle the new lungs in her condition." Owens answered carefully. He saw Hopper quickly spin on the heel of his foot.

"She's gonna live... right? " Hopper asked with his eyes wide. As moments passed with no answer, he could see the unsure silence in Sam's eyes as he bit the inside of his cheek.

"Right?!" Hopper barked louder. How could they be unsure? She had to survive this! This was Joyce! Joyce survived everything! She couldn't die now, not like this. Not until they were both 80 years old with a long happy life together behind them! She couldn't die now.

"I just don't know this time, Hop." Owens replied sadly, patting

Hopper's shoulder before walking away. Jim felt his knees go weak as he leaned against the glass. He stared at Joyce through the window, ignoring the tear dropping from his own reflection.

Hopper pushed the doors open to the chapel, peeking his head inside to make sure he would be alone. When his solidarity was confirmed, he slipped inside and made his way to a pew in the front row.

He groaned quietly as he sat down on the wooden bench. He couldn't remember the last time he prayed—or even thought about it really. Maybe the last time he prayed was in fourth grade, begging God to let him win the baseball game to please his dad. To be honest, he didn't really even know how to pray anymore. Taking a deep breath and pressing his palms together, he closed his eyes.

"Hey, God. It's me, Jim. Y'know, the one you've screwed over quite a bit... sorry, just kidding, sorta. I haven't done this in a while, sorry about that too. I know it seems pretty shitty of me to ask a favor after this long but I really need it. There's this girl...well, woman. Her name is Joyce and I'm kinda falling for her. I know, I know, I sound like I'm 14 again. But she's really sick and all I'm asking is that you don't take her from me, alright? I think I'm more scared to lose her than I am of losing myself... does that make sense? It's not her time yet though. It can't be, she's too young. I know your inbox up there is filled with starving babies and Ebola, but this is really important. I know how it's probably not the best to make a bargain with God but I'll do anything to make sure she stays healthy and alive. She means too much to me."

As Hopper leaned against the pew in front of him while praying, Jenny silently crept into the chapel. Surprise struck her as she saw Hopper silently praying in the front of the room. She didn't think Hopper knew this room existed, let alone him being religious. When an almost silent sniffle was let out, she realized what was going on. Quietly walking up to Jim, she sat down in the pew with him.

"Hopper." She whispered. Before she could say another word, he collapsed against her, immersed in sobbing tears. Jenny enveloped him in a tight hug, hushing him while he cried.

This was the one thing they didn't teach her in nursing school. How to handle when one patient falls in love with another who's dying.

11. Watch Me Fall, Watch Me Rise

Summary for the Chapter:

Four Weeks & Three Days.

Notes for the Chapter:

The song in this chapter is 'Then' by Brad Paisley

Two weeks. Two weeks since Joyce was moved to isolation. She had been making small milestones even though she was still sedated and intubated. The cloud in her lungs was reducing each day, she continued to fight the ventilator; proving that her lung function was still somewhat there, she was no longer extremely contagious, and the color had returned to her skin.

Not a day went by that Hop didn't visit her in her room, having to be nearly dragged out at the end of each day. Today? Today was gonna be a little different though.

"Hi, sweetheart," Hopper whispered as he walked into Joyce's isolation unit. A scrappy yellow scrub gown wrapped around his body tightly as his guitar was strung over his back. She didn't look any different than the last few visits he made, but she looked better than she did on day one. The same tubes still hung from her lips, ventilating each breath for her.

Before he sat down, Hop leaned over and kissed her forehead, maneuvering the tubes and wires. Saying it was hard to see her like this would be an understatement. He missed the Joyce that had rosy pink cheeks and sparkling brown eyes. She was in there, somewhere.

Hopper removed the guitar from his back and laid it gently in his lap, positioning it to play.

*"I remember, trying not to stare, the night that I first met you
You had me mesmerized*

*And three weeks later, in the front porch light
Taking forty-five minutes to kiss goodnight
I hadn't told you yet
But I thought I loved you then"*

He sang quietly as his fingers plucked at the strings. It was hard to hold back his own tears as he played the song to her.

*"And now you're my whole life
Now you're my whole world
I just can't believe the way I feel about you, girl
Like a river meets the sea,
Stronger than it's ever been.
We've come so far since that day
And I thought I loved you then"*

The sound of the air-locked door opening alerted Hopper that they were no longer alone together. His fingers continued to strum as he realized Jenny was leaning against the wall, listening to the music.

"She loves country music. I hate it but she just adores it." Hop laughed quietly. Jenny smiled and pulled another chair up to the side of Joyce's bed. Surprisingly to Hopper, the nurse started singing the next verse.

*"And I remember, taking you back to right where I first met you,
You were so surprised
There were people around, but I didn't care
I got down on one knee right there and once again,
I thought I loved you then"*

They sang together as Hopper played, both of them keeping their eyes on Joyce as the small melody hummed through the air. The two swayed in their seats to the music, praying that Joyce could hear it too.

*"And I can just see you, with a baby on the way
And I can just see you, when your hair is turning gray
What I can't see is how I'm ever gonna love you more
But I've said that before"*

Hop and Jenny hummed the harmony in unison, letting their vocals strum against the walls. She could see the tears begin to well in Hopper's eyes as he continued playing, he looked as if it was taking every ounce of him not to break down.

Two weeks and three days. Joyce's temperature was officially out of the 100's. Her white cell count was coming out of the dangerously high zone, and Hopper had a special surprise planned.

"CDC and Owens will have my ass over the mantle if I let you put a Christmas tree in an ISO room, Hop." Jenny chuckled as she finished drawing Joyce's labs.

"C'mon, Jennifer. Don't you think she'd love it? What if they bring her out of the sedation before Christmas! She'll get to see a tree!" Hopper grinned like a child in a candy store as he pleaded.

"How about we compromise? I'll let you put one outside her window since we don't have any other patients up here to worry about. Deal?" the nurse gave him a smile with her brows raised.

"Deal!" Jim smiled back, already planning on making it the most spectacular tree he could possibly produce.

And that he did. Gold and red bulb ornaments hung around the 4-foot tree in her window. Hopper had given Jenny a \$100 dollar bill and told her to find the best ornaments she could so they could put some much-needed color to the stark hallway. Even Owens had helped hang a couple bulbs on the tree.

Three weeks. Three weeks from November 22nd, the last day he had heard her beautiful voice. Every single moment he could, Hopper spent holding her hand and talking to her. He didn't have much to say on this day though. It was more or less just memories at this point, thinking back to all those beautiful smiles and laughs that

made his world spin off its axis.

His hands gently gripped her waist as she leaned against him, swaying along to the music that echoed off of Jim's phone. Joyce had told him she always wanted to dance in the moonlight, which provoked him to take her up to the roof and dance with her. Neither of them could wipe the smiles off their faces as they leaned against each other under the night sky.

"Right there, that string. Put your ring finger over it and strum with your right hand. There you go!" Hopper laughed as Joyce played a note on his guitar. Her pearly white smile of accomplishment made his heart flip. Her nose crinkled and her smile grew bigger when he pressed a small kiss to her cheek.

"I think that's Orion's belt." Hopper squinted as he pointed to the sky. He and Joyce were lying back on the couch on the roof, her body tightly nestled into his arms. "Hop, that's the Big Dipper." she laughed, nearly collapsing her head against his chest in hysterics.

"Have faith, Hop." "Keep faith!" "Have a little faith" all the time, those words left Joyce's lips like a constant mantra. He never understood it, not until now. Not until having faith that she would get better was his only lifeline.

"I kept my faith, Joycie." he whispered, his thumb stroking the top of her hand as he smiled.

Three weeks and five days, he painted her nails.

Three weeks and six days, he hung lights up in her room.

Four weeks, he told her all the things he couldn't wait to see with her.

Four weeks and one day, he played all her favorite songs on his guitar.

Four weeks and two days, he prayed with her.

Four weeks and three days. That was the day that everything changed.

December 23rd, officially four weeks and three days since he had last heard her voice, seen her smile, and laughed with her. All he had done that day was sit in her room with her hand in his, just staring at the little black eyelashes that rested against her cheeks.

Owens had tapped on the window, smiling bigger than Hopper had ever seen him. Jim kissed Joyce's forehead, promising he would be back before going to see Sam.

"I have an early Christmas gift for you." the doctor grinned as Hopper came out of the airlock entry.

"Please tell me you're gonna wake her up!" Jim pleaded, tears threatening to fall harder than ever before.

"Even better. We're prepping her for surgery, Hop. A healthy set of lungs just came in and she's a match." Owens said with a prideful grin as he patting Hopper's shoulder.

The tears welling in Hopper's eyes crashed down his cheeks as he launched into Sam, hugging the doctor as tightly as possible.

"Wait a second," Jim said as pulled back. "If you have lungs, that means—"

"Congratulations." Owens smiled.

12. Clean Slate

Summary for the Chapter:

Reaching the finish line

"Where the hell am I?" she muttered, rubbing her head as if she was trying to wake up. The lights were blaring in her eyes, she hadn't been here before, had she? Looking around, she didn't recognize much of it.

"You're in limbo. A little place between life and death that you hang out in during surgery." a voice answered from behind her. As she pivoted on her feet, she saw the only face she wanted to see.

"Why are you here, Hop?" Joyce asked with a soft smile as she walked towards him.

"Because I'm on the table in the next room over." he grinned, bringing her into a tight hug.

Doctor Owens was flipping through a chart at the nurses' station when Martin Brenner, the chief of surgery, came angrily rushing up to him. Sam barely let his eyes glance away when he saw the surgeon getting closer.

"Good afternoon, Doctor Brenner. How can I help you?" Owens asked nonchalantly. He knew that Brenner was pissed, and he knew he was the epicenter of it all.

"What are you playing at, Owens? You know there are at least six people above Jim Hopper for a heart in this hospital alone. So tell me why his name is on the whiteboard down on the surgical floor?" Brenner fumed, trying to keep his tone as quiet as can be.

"He's receiving the heart, Brenner. He's been on the list for ages and he's been getting worse. He deserves the transplant." Owens sighed as he tucked the chart under his armpit. He knew that Brenner wouldn't

have approved Jim for the surgery, but in his days as Hopper's surgeon, he had learned quite a bit from him.

"You don't get to decide who gets a transplant and who doesn't, Owens!" Brenner's face was glowing red with anger in deep contrast with his white hair.

"You listen to me and you listen good," Owens growled as he stepped up to his boss. "You have been playing God for a very long time, ruling over who gets what organ and when. I have had enough of you dictating over my patients just because you don't like them. Jim is rough around the edges, we all know that, but he is going to get that heart. Even if you don't like it." There was a dark glimmer in Sam's eyes as he was nose to nose with Brenner.

Just as Owens began to walk away, Brenner huffed a laugh. "Not if I don't let him. I refuse to let my staff take him to the O.R., Your move, Owens." Martin was standing with a smirk while his arms stayed crossed against his chest.

Sam turned on his heel back to face Brenner. "You're too late, Brenner. They took Hopper in for the transplant about four hours ago." Sam glanced at his watch. "They should be closing him up right now." The smirk on Sam's face made the surgeon's blood boil.

"This is a breach of ethics, Owens. The board will have no choice but to yank your license. Is that what you wanted?" Brenner was clearly livid with the conniving actions the younger doctor took.

"Speaking of that. This is for you." Sam pulled the chart out from under his arm and fished out a piece of paper. Brenner ripped it out of his hand and squinted as he read it.

"Letter of resignation? You've really had this all planned out." Brenner cocked his mouth with an angry grin. He always knew Owens' audacity would get in his way.

"Yeah well, the wife wants to go to Boca. No better time." Sam smiled as he began to walk away. "Oh, and Checkmate," he said with a shit-eating grin.

Jenny picked up the nurses' station phone and begun dialing. As the line to the OR rang.

"Hi, it's Jenny. Just wondering how they're doing," she spoke as she anxiously tapped her nails on her desk. It had been three hours since both Joyce and Hopper were in surgery and neither OR's had released an update.

"They're closing up Jim's chest right now and the heart is already off to a good kick without any problems. Joyce's lungs puffed up and she's been pretty stable throughout the surgery. She's pretty lucky she got those lungs right away, both the CF and TB had left pretty nasty scar tissue in her old lungs." the OR nurse replied over the echoing voices of the surgeons.

"Alright, CICU has both of their beds ready. Room 532 and 533, I'll be up there when you finish closing up." Jenny hung up the phone and took a deep breath. It was the oddest feeling in her stomach, a mixture of pride and fear. Nurses' cocktail of emotions. This was it though, she had seen hundreds of thousands of patients in her career but this was different. These two nearly hit the finish line. They weren't just patients anymore, they were like family.

Three days later, Joyce opened her eyes for the first time in over a month. It wasn't much surprise to her that even three days after a heart transplant that Hopper was out of bed and sitting next to her.

"Hop," she whispered, her voice choppy and hoarse, but still her.

"I promised myself I'd be here when you woke up. I couldn't miss it." Jim smiled as he kissed her palm.

"What the hell happened?" Joyce asked in an almost silent mutter.

"We kept faith, Joyce. We kept faith and we laughed right through it." he grinned with a tear in his eye.

"What do we do next?" she questioned, staring up at his bright blue eyes.

"We live as normal as possible." Hopper laughed quietly, knowing that nothing would ever be normal about them.

"Together?"

"Together."

13. Epilogue

Summary for the Chapter:

Epilogue! I'm super excited that this has finally been finished. I've been working on this for almost a month and it has been fun but draining! Let me know if I should do a sequel!

Eight Years Later

Joyce smiled as she walked across the stage and towards the podium. Donned in an elegant crimson dress while her palm rested on her growing belly. She could see her husband and son seated in the front row amongst thousands of people. She still chuckled at him wearing something other than his newly earned police uniform. Their three-year-old son, Will, sat happily on his father's lap as they watched Joyce begin her speech for the UNOS Gala.

"8 years ago today, my husband Jim and I both underwent an organ transplant. While I was receiving a double lung transplant, he was receiving a heart. Together, our battle hasn't been easy but thankfully it's nowhere near over with. We were blessed with the gift of life by a man named William Ives. His donation not only saved one life, but several. His blessing was divided and multiplied, giving so many others a second chance at life. Because of Mr. Ives, my husband and I lived to see the day we got married and we also were able to have a son who is named after the man who is cherished for his blessing, and another child on the way. Not a day goes by where my family doesn't thank Mr. Ives for his gift of life. Because of him, many generations will have a chance at life and he will be along with each of them. So, I urge all of you to please sign up to become an organ donor, someday you can give the gift of life like Mr. William Ives gave to us."

Joyce smiled as the entire room erupted in clapping and cheers. When she first walked into Hawkins Hospital, she would've never believed she would become the CEO of UNOS. Jim chased after his dream of being in the police force, excelling each and every day. Although their son had been born with similar lung defects as Joyce,

they provided him with the best care they could find to ensure he too would have a happy ending.

As Joyce walked off the stage, Jim wrapped her in a tight hug, peppering her cheek with kisses before planting one on her lips.

"I'm so proud of you. I love you, Joyce," he whispered happily.

"I love you too," she replied, grinning as she lifted their son onto her hip.

All was well.

Notes for the Chapter:

Thanks for reading <3

Author's Note:

The first three chapters are probably going to be like breaking the ice, y'know? So there are a few chapters to get to know them better.